Yukon Wilderness Tourism Best Management Practices for Heritage Resources

Draft
June 2008

Yukon
Tourism and Culture

DISCLAIMER

Nothing in the Yukon Government Wilderness Tourism Best Management Practices for Heritage Resources documents, references, etc, shall be construed as waiving compliance with regulatory requirements imposed by law. It remains the responsibility of commercial operators to satisfy themselves that the measures adopted in the specific instance are appropriate to the situation and satisfy all legal requirements within the jurisdiction.

Specific BMPs for specific problems cannot be given since solutions will, of necessity, be site and issue specific. Narrative BMPs are given indicating the type of measure which may be useful.

This guide is intended to provide users with up-to-date information about best management practices for heritage resources and wilderness tourism on the Yukon Landscape but these guidelines should not be considered as comprehensive. There are both known and unknown sources of data which have not yet been incorporated and topics which have not yet been treated or addressed. These topics and data will be incorporated and new versions of the documents uploaded as time and resources permit. By their very nature many specific BMPs soon become obsolete as "better" BMPs become available but the concept and the identified objectives behind the examples remain valid.

Any comments, questions, or suggestions regarding the content of this document may be directed to:

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All photos courtesy of Yukon Government except as otherwise noted.

Cover image: collapsed stage cache

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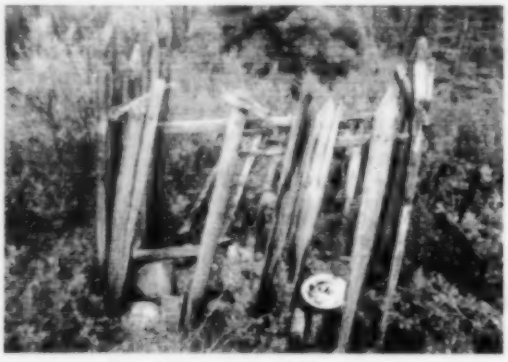
1. Objectives

To protect and manage historic sites and resources, and to protect burials outside of known cemeteries.

Collapsed stage cache with household goods.



Fence grave with personal belongings.

2. Context of Historic Resource Protection and Management

Historic resources exist throughout the Yukon landscape in all terrains including mountain tops, and even under water. Remains of built heritage in many instances are fragile due to their age and composition, which is frequently wood or other organic materials.

Archaeological remains that date to the historic period or that are thousands of years old are often buried in only a few centimetres of soil. Even minor disturbance of the ground surface can impact on archaeological sites. All heritage resources are vulnerable to looting or unauthorized collection and increased activity in a previously isolated area may see the loss of irreplaceable objects that are part of Yukon's history.

Inventories of historic resources are lacking for many regions of the Yukon. Many remote areas have never been surveyed and the historic resources are not adequately documented. Backcountry activities and use may inadvertently impact on historic resources. Wilderness tourism operators can assist in heritage protection by becoming informed about heritage resource identification and low impact activities which respect and preserve the evidence of Yukon's history. Visitor education is also important to ensure that Yukon's heritage can be appreciated without loss or damage to fragile sites and objects.

The adoption of "Best Management Practices" can assist Yukon's Wilderness Tourism industry in the protection and appreciation of Yukon's rich heritage.

3. Legislative Context

Historic resources are protected from disturbance under the *Yukon Historic Resources Act* – Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulation. The Government of Yukon is responsible for managing historic sites on non-settlement land and outside of national parks. Protection of archaeological sites and burials is addressed as well under the *Territorial Lands Act*, Section fifteen. No one may search for, investigate, excavate, disturb or otherwise alter an historic site on Yukon lands except in accordance with a permit under the Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulation. No objects may be removed from a historic site without a permit under the Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulation. Permits are issued to qualified researchers only, usually professional or consulting archaeologists.

Activities requiring land use permits are reviewed under the *Yukon Environmental and Socioeconomic Assessment Act* (YESAA). The proponent will be required to provide adequate information to allow the evaluation of the likelihood and significance of adverse effects of the project on heritage resources, and identify proposed mitigation measures. Contact the Government of Yukon - Heritage Resources Office for assistance in determining any heritage resources impact from planned activities.

Clockwise from top left: collapsed log-cabin style of cache; stage cache; collapsed stage cache with notched log ladder.

4. Potential Impacts to Heritage Resources as a Result of Wilderness Tourism Activities

Increased Access

Increased access to back country as a result of wilderness tourism can lead to the disturbance of heritage sites and features. Previously remote sites may become the focus of looting or may be disturbed or inadvertently damaged by human activities and 'souvenir hunting'. High latitude and alpine and sub-alpine areas where little or no soil development has occurred are particularly vulnerable. Traces of human activity may include stone tent rings, stone hunting blinds, stone meat caches and remains of camps where stone tools and chips have remained on the ground surface for thousands of years. Disturbance of stone features and trampling of artefacts is a concern in these areas.

Semi-circular hunting blind

Remains of a large brush camp

Brushing/Clearing

Brushing or clearing of vegetation for camp sites may impact surface or built heritage sites such as brush camps, traps, or burial sites, or other traces of historic human presence such as snares or marked trees.

Subsurface and Ground Disturbance

These activities are most likely to impact buried archaeological sites, with impacts increasing proportionally to the area/extent of the ground disturbance. Development of substantial infrastructure (cabins for guests, for example) will likely result in subsurface ground disturbance. Even pit privies are a source of impact.

Buried sill-logs and flooring from a historic cabin

5. Best Management Practices for Heritage Resource Protection for Yukon Wilderness Tourism

• Identify and map all known historic sites in the project area prior to backcountry travel or other activities. Information on the location of known sites (historical, archaeological and palaeontological) is available from the Heritage Resources Unit, Yukon Government. Information on traditional use sites and areas can be obtained from the First Nation(s). Sensitive heritage sites, such as graves, should be avoided.

• Educate and inform visitors and clients about Yukon's laws protecting heritage. No disturbance is permitted to heritage sites encountered during backcountry activities. No objects may be removed from heritage sites.

• No-trace camping protects heritage resources as well as the environment. (http://www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/camping/leavenotrace.php)

• It is recommended that facilities, infrastructure and developments associated with wilderness tourism ventures be designed to minimize ground disturbance and clearing.

• Where ground disturbing development or activities are unavoidable, these should be planned in areas of low heritage potential. For example, buffers of 60-100 metres along a terrace edge or bordering a water body will often avoid heritage resource impacts. Plan to have archaeological impact assessment carried out where activities or developments impact area of high heritage potential.

• If heritage sites or resources are discovered during backcountry activities, Yukon Heritage Resources Unit should be informed of the location and nature of the site. The publication: *Handbook for the Identification of Heritage Sites and Features*, can assist in the operator in recognizing heritage resources. (http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/publications_heritagehandbook.pdf)

• If human skeletal remains are discovered in an unmarked burial or exposed in the ground, the R.C.M.P must be notified. If the R.C.M.P. and Coroner determine that this is a historic burial, the First Nation and Yukon Heritage Resources will be notified. Please refer to *Guidelines Respecting the Discovery of Human Remains and First Nation Burial Sites in the Yukon* (http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/respecting_guidelines.pdf)

Birch bark baby carrier

Hillside meat cache

6. Best Management Practices for Palaeontological Resource Protection for Wilderness Tourism

In areas known to contain rich palaeontological resources (for example, Old Crow River, Porcupine River, Eagle River, Peel River, Blackstone River, Klondike Gold Fields, Beaver Creek), fossils of ice age mammals may become exposed as a result of natural bank erosion. Fossils of invertebrate animals and plants may be discovered in bedrock outcrops throughout the Yukon. Fossils are protected under the *Historic Resources Act (HRA)*.

- Fossils that are discovered should be set aside and protected from further disturbance, and reported to the Yukon Palaeontology program as soon as possible.
- If fossils are collected for the Yukon Palaeontology Program, record GPS coordinates and photograph.
- Ivory from mammoth and mastodon tusks is also protected under the HRA. However, there are provisions and permits in place to sell and/or export ivory if it can be determined that the ivory is of limited scientific value relative to its artistic and economic value.
- In the event that mummified remains or intact skeletons are exposed, Yukon Palaeontology should be contacted before disturbing them further, as these findings are of considerable scientific importance. If unable to contact Yukon Palaeontology, move and/or protect the remains (with intact surrounding sediments) to the best of your ability until they can be collected and preserved by Yukon Palaeontology personnel.

The major drainage basins of unglaciated northern Yukon preserve exceptional evidence of Ice Age animals and environments. As modern rivers cut down through the sediments, the frozen silts containing bone and plant materials are exposed.

Fossil bones that wash out of the silt bluffs along the rivers of northern Yukon may be found redeposited on point bars on rivers.

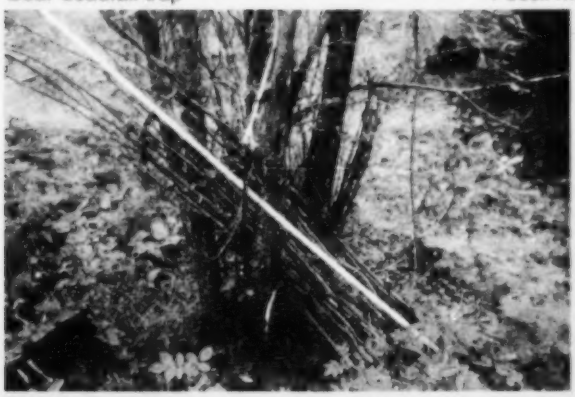
7. Definitions

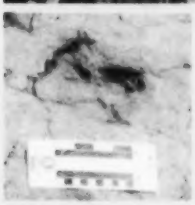
Historic resources as defined in legislation include historical, archaeological and palaeontological sites and resources. Historic resources are abandoned sites and objects of greater than 45 years in antiquity. Cabins, caches, graves, brush camps, and other man-made structures, features or objects are the most readily recognized historic resources. Archaeological sites tend to date to before European contact and are found on or under the ground surface, and generally consist of the remains of ancient camps, hearths, stone tools and debris.

Palaeontological resources are fossil and other remains of extinct or prehistoric plants and animals. These include bones of mammoth, horse, bison and other ice age fauna as well as fossil remains and traces of plants, vertebrate and invertebrate fauna.

Bear deadfall trap

Fossil mammoth bone recovered in a placer mine.





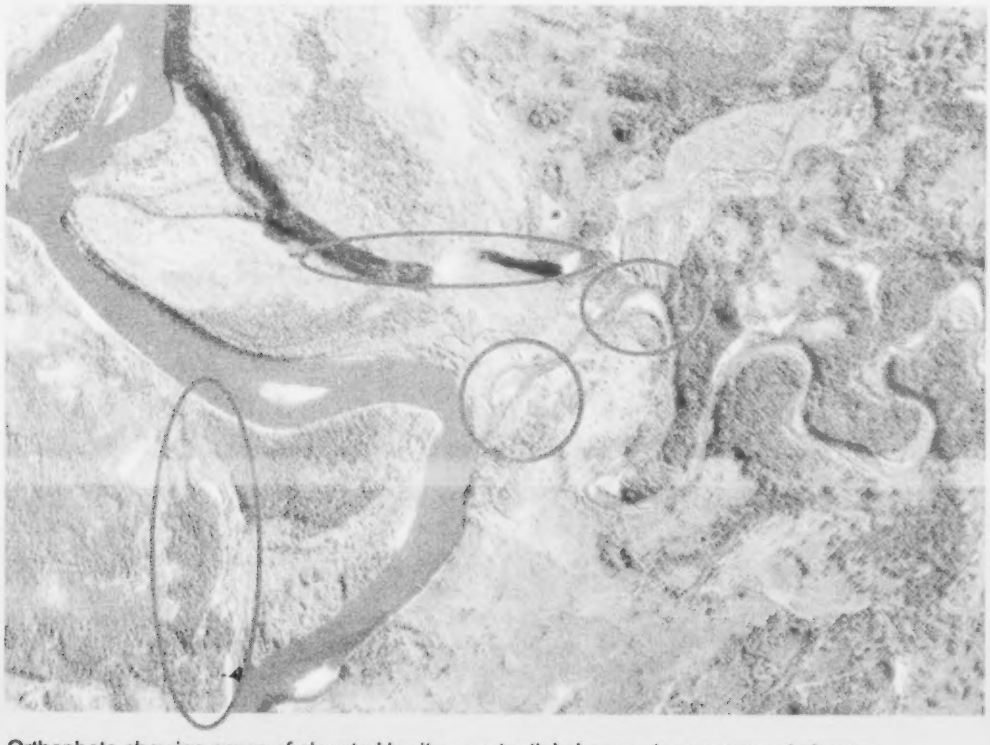
Left: dinosaur footprint in bedrock exposure.

Above: old 'basket' style fish trap

Right: dugout canoe

8. Identifying Areas of High Heritage Potential

Based on known patterns of prehistoric and historic land use for a region, certain terrain types, localities and landscape features can be identified as likely locations for camps, travel routes or as strategic resource areas. Generally, areas in proximity to water bodies, stream courses and wetlands, prominent lookout situations on terraces, ridges and knolls and combinations of these terrain zones are considered to be of high heritage potential. Depending on the region, other high potential localities may include shorelines of pro-glacial and neo-glacial lakes, meltwater channels, ancient river terraces and abandoned drainages. In unglaciated northern Yukon, both ancient landscapes and possibly different prey species must be factored in to reconstruction of past land use patterns.



Orthophoto showing areas of elevated heritage potential along water courses, at stream confluences and on ancient river terraces.

9. Obtaining Information about Archaeological, Palaeontological and Historic Sites for an Area

Information on the location of known heritage sites in a development area can be obtained from the Yukon Government Heritage Resources Unit. Coordinates provided for some sites may not be precise. Information on sites has been gathered over many decades and most coordinates were obtained prior to precision GPS. Coordinates for any given site might vary by up to 200 metres. Site locations are provided as point data, usually marked at the centre of a site. Sites vary in extent and size however, and information regarding this is located in the site record. You should pay particular attention to this if you are planning development activities in the vicinity of an heritage site. Territorial and federal law prohibits development activities within 30 metres of a known or suspected heritage site. Because of the inaccuracy of site location data in the Registry, a 200 metre buffer around sites is a recommended management approach where planned activates may impact a site.

Backcountry travellers and wilderness tourism operators can assist Yukon Government Heritage Resources Unit in providing accurate GPS coordinates and current photographs of heritage sites.

Cabin at Copper City

Brush camp

10. Recording and Reporting

The following information should be recorded for heritage sites or features encountered in the field:

- GPS location: latitude/longitude or UTM coordinates and NAD (27 or 83).
- Current date and time.
- Estimate of site or feature extent (area and/or depth)
- Brief description of setting and access to assist others in locating the site.
- Brief description of site features (e.g., cabin with collapsed cache and scatter of household goods).
- Photographs.

Please report heritage sites and features to:

Heritage Resources
Department of Tourism and Culture
Government of Yukon
Box 2703,
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6
Phone: (867) 667-5983 or toll-free 1-800-661-0408
Email: HeritagePublications@gov.yk.ca

11. References: Legislation, Policy and Standards for Historic Site Conservation and Management

Yukon Government Links

Heritage Resources Unit – Archaeology Program
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/76.html
Heritage Resources Unit – Palaeontology Program
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/81.html
Historic Sites Unit
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/79.html

Policy and Guidelines

Guidelines Respecting the Discovery of Human Remains and First Nation Burial Sites in the Yukon:
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/respecting_guidelines.pdf
Handbook for the identification of Heritage Sites and Features
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/publications_heritagehandbook.pdf
Parks Canada - Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada http://www.historicplaces.ca/nor-sta/pdf/sgnld_e.pdf
Government of British Columbia Archaeological Impact Assessment Guidelines
http://www.tsa.gov.bc.ca/archaeology/docs/impact_assessment_guidelines/index.htm

Legislation

Yukon Historic Resources Act
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/historic_resources_act.pdf
Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulation
http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/oic2003_073.pdf
Yukon Environment and Socioeconomic Assessment Act
http://www.yesab.ca/